

all faiths—whether they come from the mosques, whether they come from the synagogues, whether they come from our churches—to go back to the Biblical writings as we look at what we are faced with today. And that is, how does a great nation, as the United States of America—how do we treat our powerless? How do we treat our poor? What opportunities do we have for people who are poor to leave poverty and move to the middle class?

The answer to those questions, Mr. Speaker, is in our hands, and I do hope that we vote and do the right thing.

RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SPEIER) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SPEIER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today, once again, to highlight the epidemic of rape and sexual assault in the military.

As I said last week, the Department of Defense, by its own calculations, estimates that over 19,000 servicemembers, mostly women but some men, are raped or sexually assaulted every single year; and, furthermore, only 13 percent report these rapes or sexual assaults. Why is that? Because the system of justice designed to adjudicate cases of rape in the military is in complete shambles. Victims are blamed. Assailants are promoted. Unit commanders, whose promotions are dependent on the conduct and performance of the soldiers they supervise, have an incentive to see that allegations are few and convictions are fewer.

Meanwhile, what are we doing here in Congress? Over the last 16 years, there have been reports and there have been hearings, 18 of them, and we make lots of noise; but then nothing is done about it. As a result of this code of silence, the overwhelming majority of cases get swept under the proverbial rug.

Last week I told the story of Technical Sergeant Mary Gallagher. The feedback I've gotten is considerable. A woman named Katie wrote on my Facebook page: "I am one of those victim soldiers. Jackie, thank you for fighting for a basic right. I have no idea why this is still not being handled properly. I dream that soon women and men will be able to serve our country without the threat of rape that will go unpunished."

But stopping military rape should be more than just a dream; it must be a reality. We owe our servicemembers the same protection that they provide to all Americans.

Today I want to share the story of Seaman Panayiotta Bertzikis. Seaman Bertzikis served in the Coast Guard from November 2005 to May of 2007. Her allegation is as follows:

On May 30, 2006, Seaman Bertzikis was raped by a shipmate when she stationed in Burlington, Vermont. During a hike, her rapist threw her onto the

ground, punched her in the face, and raped her.

She reported the rape to command, who told her to cease speaking about it or she would be charged with the military equivalent of slander. She later obtained photographs and admissions made by her rapist through the Freedom of Information Act, but command failed to bring him to justice in any way. Instead, they forced Seaman Bertzikis to live on the same floor with her rapist, where he would remain a constant threat. Command also told the seaman to work with her rapist and use the time together to "work out their differences."

Command was well aware, but did not stop, further assaults and harassment of Seaman Bertzikis. Instead, she was transferred to Boston where Coast Guard personnel called her a "liar" and a "whore."

When she was on base performing her duties, a group of Coast Guard personnel cornered Seaman Bertzikis and tried to rip off her uniform. They called her a "crazy lying whore" and said she would "pay for snitching" on their friend. They threatened to rape her again.

When she reported this harassment, the Coast Guard's "victim advocate" told her not to pursue disciplinary action because she would be seen as "difficult." In addition, her appointed attorney said if her rapist did not have a history of sexual assault, "why would he assault anyone now?" Seaman Bertzikis was denied rank because of the pending investigation, despite the fact that she had met all the necessary requirements.

She described her horrific ordeal this way: "If I told them that my house was broken into, not one person would question me, blame me, or say that I was lying. But when I say that my body was broken into, people automatically feel that they have the right to judge me, to doubt me, and to blame me."

What a profound statement by Seaman Bertzikis. She has now started the Military Rape Crisis Center to help her fellow colleagues and victims. Turning pain into purpose, she is truly an American shero.

Seaman Bertzikis's story shows the urgent need to protect servicemembers from abuse.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 58 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until noon.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. CAPITO) at noon.

PRAYER

Reverend Dr. Jack Graham, Prestonwood Baptist Church, Plano, Texas, offered the following prayer:

Heavenly Father, we are blessed by Your presence, amazed by Your grace, and dependent upon Your strength for every day. We praise You for Your abundant provision, and we are forever grateful for Your sustaining love. We do not take these blessings for granted. We make it our holy ambition to glorify You as we offer our lives in devoted service to Your Kingdom first, and to our beloved country.

We pray for one another with the confidence that You hear repentant hearts and respond to those who humbly seek to obey You and live by Your wisdom.

We pray for personal renewal, for robust faith, and a vibrant vision for the future. Remembering that righteousness exalts a nation, we turn to You and trust You to not only make us great, but to make us good.

We pray in the name of God, who is able to raise His dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to life and give us eternal hope in Him.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House her approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

Mr. POE of Texas. Madam Speaker, pursuant to clause 1, rule I, I demand a vote on agreeing to the Speaker's approval of the Journal.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the Speaker's approval of the Journal.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. POE of Texas. Madam Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8, rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. CICILLINE) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. CICILLINE led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOMING REVEREND DR. JACK GRAHAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Texas